

Rights

Equal Rights for All

The most basic right of citizenship has been equal access and protection under the law. The fight to extend this right to all began before the Declaration of Independence proclaimed “all men are created equal,” and continues today.



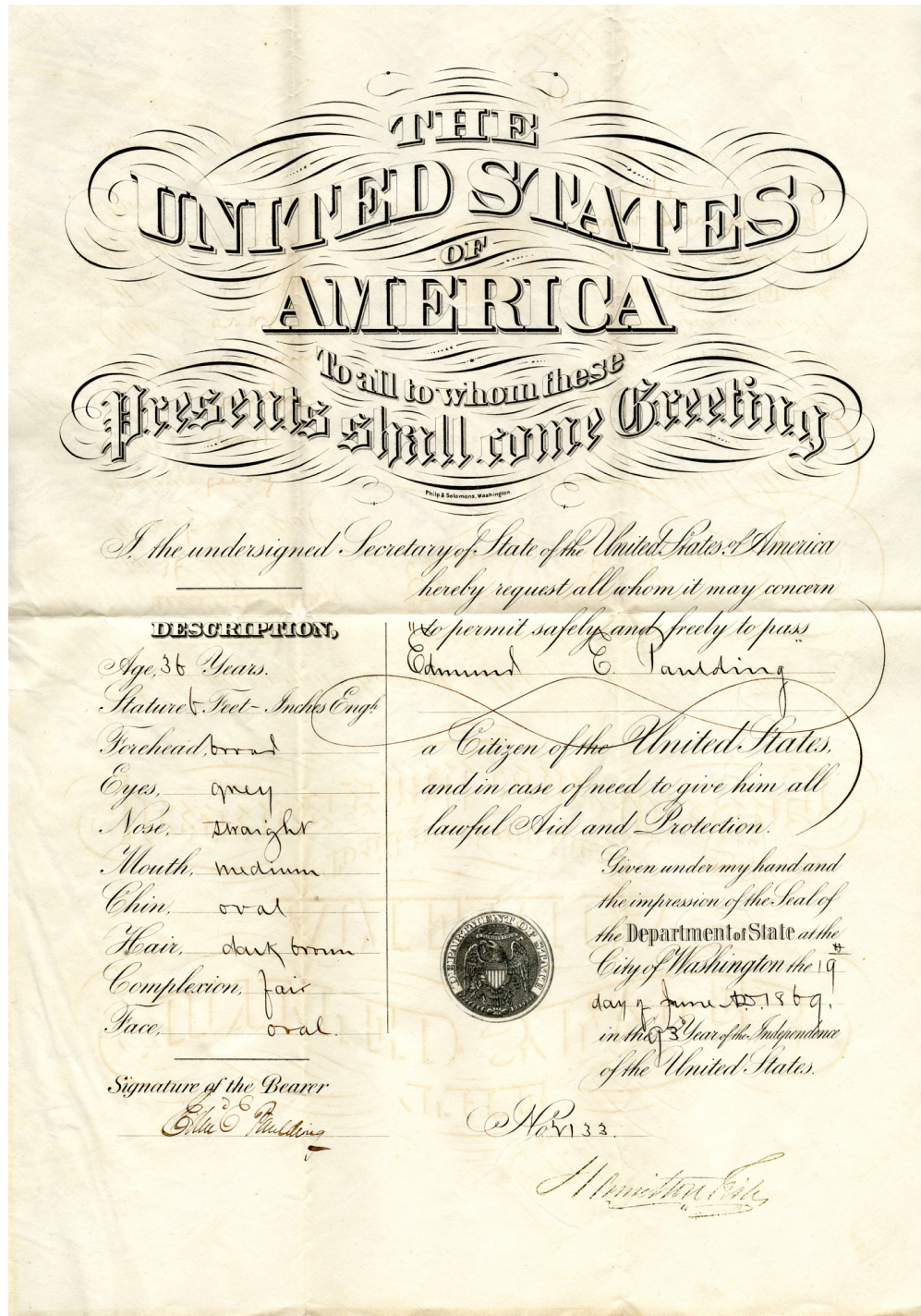
Equal rights buttons

Gifts of Timothy D. W. Connelly in memory of Gordon Montgomery Connelly, Roger A. Fischer, Pearl B. Cole, and Shepard Center, and transfer from Library of Congress

Your Country's Representation

One of the assumed rights of citizenship is that your government will represent you. Originally serving as a letter of introduction to foreign governments on behalf of Americans traveling abroad, the very earliest passport was designed by Benjamin Franklin during the War of Independence when he served as minister

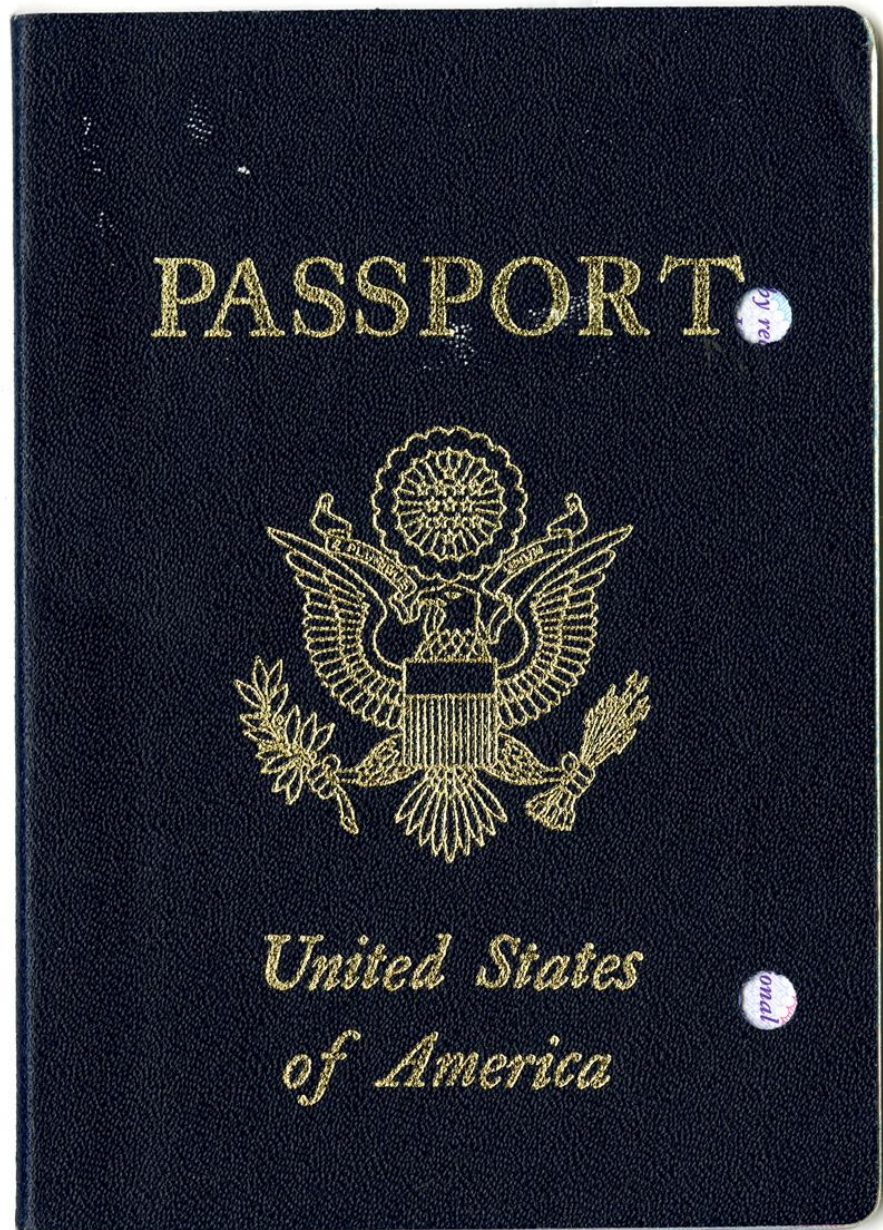
to France. While regulations have changed over the years, passports are official documents issued by the U.S. Department of State that identify the holder as a citizen.



Passport, 1869

Gift of Mrs. Harry C. Lamberton

[View object record </collections/nmah_1464439>](#)



Passport, 1999
Gift of Sara Murphy

Freedom of Speech

San Francisco poet, artist, and publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti was an influential figure of the 1950s Beat Generation and the social revolution of the 1960s. In 1956 he was arrested and tried on obscenity charges for publishing and selling Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl*. This landmark case established a key

legal precedent for the publication of controversial literary pieces. His victory expanded the right to free speech and opened the way for an explosion of new works that tested the boundaries of literary expression.



Lawrence Ferlinghetti's typewriter from his San Francisco bookstore

[View object record </collections/nmah_1401496>](/collections/nmah_1401496)

The Right to Bear Arms

The Second Amendment of the Constitution granted that “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” The debate over what this right actually means is highly contested.



Bumper sticker, 2014

[View object record </collections/nmah_1591136>](#)

Right to an Education

Though not guaranteed by the Constitution, Americans have largely agreed that an educated citizenry is a requirement for a healthy democracy. The more controversial question was: should it and can it be equal and open to all?

THE RIGHT TO READ

TARGET FOR THE 70's

"Any child who fails to acquire the ability to read has been denied a right—a right as fundamental as the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—the right to read. . . .

"It is inexcusable that in this day when man has achieved such giant steps in the development of his potential, when many of his accomplishments approach the miraculous, there still should be those who do not learn to read. . . .

"Therefore, as U.S. Commissioner of Education, I am herewith proclaiming my belief that we should immediately set for ourselves the goal of assuring that by the end of the 1970's the right to read shall be a reality for all—that no one shall be leaving our schools without the skill and the desire necessary to read to the full limits of his capability."

James E. Allen, Jr.
U.S. Commissioner of Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE / OFFICE OF EDUCATION

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1970 O - 376-101

Poster produced by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1970
Transfer from U.S. Department of Education

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that public schools segregated by race were unconstitutional, stating “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.” Through their decision, the Court entered into the ongoing debate of whether education should be a right of every citizen.

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Nos. 1, 2, 4 AND 10.—OCTOBER TERM, 1953.

1 Oliver Brown, et al.,
 Appellants,
 v.
Board of Education of To- On Appeal From the
peka, Shawnee County, United States District
Kansas, et al. Court for the District
 of Kansas.

2 Harry Briggs, Jr., et al.,
 Appellants,
 v.
R. W. Elliott, et al. On Appeal From the
 United States District
 Court for the Eastern
 District of South Caro-
 lina.

4 Dorothy E. Davis, et al.,
 Appellants,
 v.
County School Board of On Appeal From the
Prince Edward County, United States District
Virginia, et al. Court for the Eastern
 District of Virginia.

10 Francis B. Gebhart, et al.,
 Petitioners,
 v.
Ethel Louise Belton, et al. On Writ of Certiorari to
 the Supreme Court of
 Delaware.

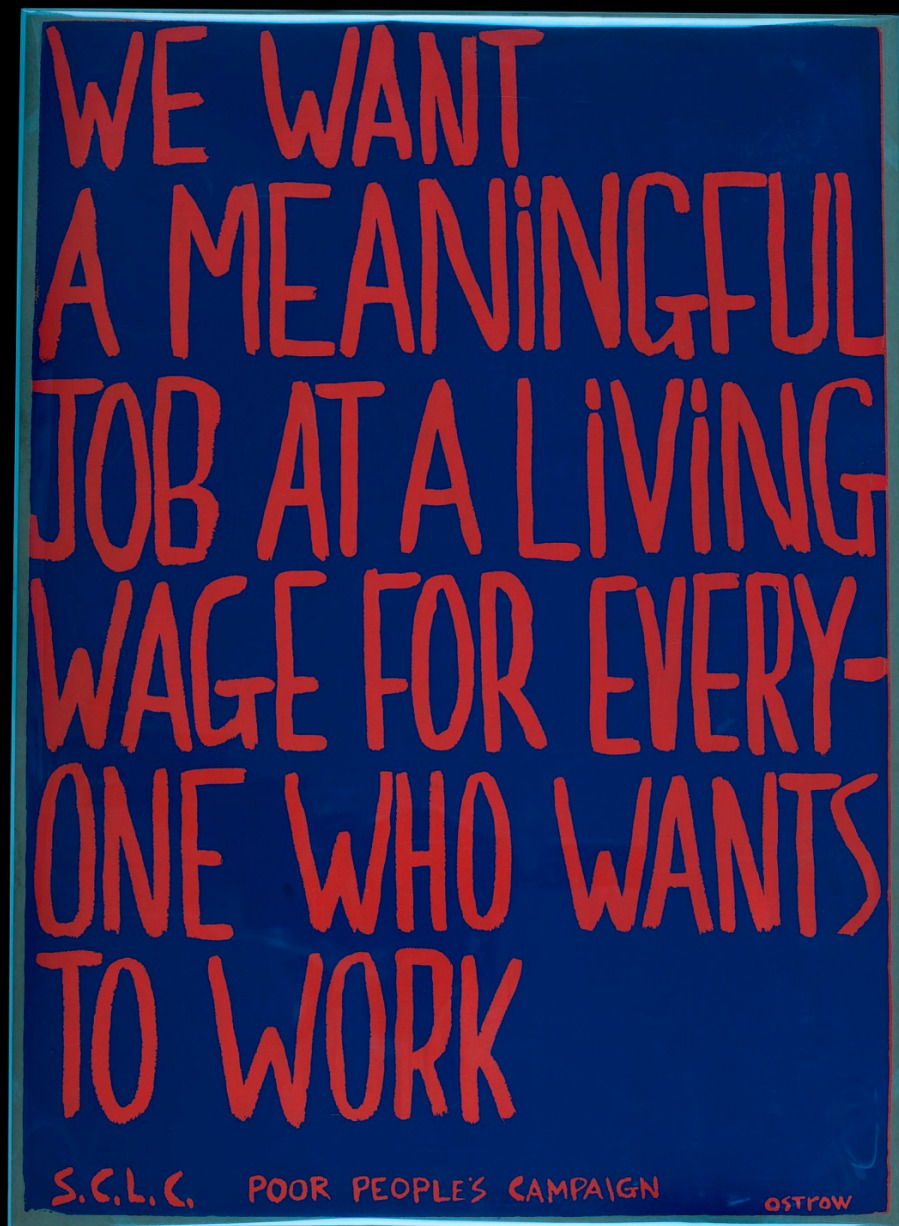
[May 17, 1954.]

MR. CHIEF JUSTICE WARREN delivered the opinion of the Court.

These cases come to us from the States of Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. They are premised on different facts and different local conditions,

A Meaningful Job

Is freedom from want the right of all Americans? What responsibility does the nation have to provide employment to its citizens? In response to economic crisis, at times the government has enacted massive employment programs. One such program, the Works Progress Administration, employed as many as eight million people during the depression of the 1930s. Federal legislation enacted in 1964 led to the establishment of the Office of Economic Opportunity as part of the “War on Poverty.”



Protest poster from Poor People's Campaign, Washington, D.C., 1968 Gift of Mrs. Clara Watkins

Right to Health Care

Citizens have turned to the government to advance public health, whether combating yellow fever epidemics in the 1790s or funding cancer research in the 21st century. In the 2000s the long-debated subject of national health care became a hotly contested political issue. The central question was: should all citizens have the right to medical care, and if so, how should it be made available?

The Value of Health Insurance



Literature produced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for the federal Health Insurance Marketplace under the Affordable Care Act, 2013



Rally for health care reform, New York City, September 22, 2009

Courtesy of Mario Tama/GettyImages

Hours & Admission

Open every day, except December 25, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Admission is free and no tickets are required.

Location & Contact

1300 Constitution Ave NW,
Washington, DC 20560 <<https://www.google.com/maps/place/smithsonian+national+museum+of+american+history/@38.8912835,-77.0322449,17z>>

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